

WBL Contract Holders Reference Group

Friday 3 May 2024

10:00am – 12.00pm

via MS Teams

Notes and Actions:

Members: ACT Training Ltd – Matt Burnett B-WBL – Berni Tyler Cambrian Training Company - Faith O’Brien Cardiff and Vale College - Alan Mackay Coleg Cambria – Johnathan Shaw Educ8 – Jude Holloway Gower College Swansea – Rachel Searle Grŵp Llandrillo Menai – Rhianwen Edwards Grŵp NPTC Group - Nicola Thornton-Scott Itec Skills and Employment – Ceri Murphy and Julie Dyer Welsh Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhian Edwards • Chris Hare • Alun Gosney • Sam Huckle • Catherine Jenkins • Nikoleta Stastna • Caitlin Davies 	Secretariat: NTfW – Lisa Mytton (Chairing) ColegauCymru - Jeff Protheroe (Note taking) Meeting Invitees: N/A Apologies: N/A
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1. Welcome and apologies (Chair)

Lisa Mytton (LM) welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies received.

2. Notes and actions from previous meeting (Chair)

Action	Status
Carried Forward – Collate issues being experienced with claiming certificates through ACW. Send through to JP / LM – by 8 Mar 24. Send on to CH	Ongoing – Doodle Poll sent out to establish best date
Carried Forward – [Evidencing eligibility requirements – Apprenticeships] AG to take forward and provide feedback to the Network	Ongoing – Progress being made. Report soon to be published.
Action – [Stephen Jones] to review the direction in the Programme Specification, with regards to ‘appraisal’ and ‘monitoring’ of H&S, for employed status individuals i.e. apprentices. Any change to be communicated to the Network via AskWBL.	Completed
Action – Share Hefin David report and CIPD and FSB report and L&W Employment Support (LM / JP)	Partly Completed – L&W Employment Support report to be disseminated

3. Welsh Government Update

a. CTER (Rhian Edwards)

RE provided the following update:

- Statement of Priorities and Strategic Plan – Only three months away from becoming operational (1 Aug 24). Branding work (inc. name change) being undertaken. The Statement of Priorities have been published, with follow up conversations with key stakeholders planned. A formal consultation will follow, which aims to inform the Strategic Plan, which must be submitted to the Cabinet Secretary [for Education] by 13 Dec 24.
- Structure and staffing – Rhian will assume the role of Executive Director of Policy and will have oversight of an Apprenticeships Team and a Skills Team, both of which will have links to the Welsh Government's Tertiary Education Division (TED). RE continued to outline the following appointments:
 - Harriet Barnes (currently HEFCW) – Director of Skills and Employability (inc. apprenticeships)
 - Geoff Hicks – Director of Funding and Analysis
 - Bethan Owen – Executive Director of Funding and Investment
- Welsh Government's Tertiary Education Division (TED). RE went on to outline the structure of TED:
 - Strategy and Funding - Sinead Gallagher
 - Learner Experience - Zenny Saunders
 - Skills - Jo Salway
 - Employability - Emma Edworthy
- Location and office. RE explained that the new offices are located a No. 2 Capital Quarter in Cardiff, and that it was the organisation's aim that the offices be accessible to other users/stakeholders.

A discussion ensued around future contract management functions, and RE confirmed that Geoff Hicks would be leading. There would be changes, and that these would be communicated soonest.

Action – JP/LM to follow up with RE to discuss/agree a way forwards with regards to communication between the Commission, Welsh Government and members of the CCH Reference Group.

b. Employability - WEST (Sam Huckle and Caitlin Davies)

SH and CD joined the group to host a discussion around the use of WEST:

- General – SH outlined that WEST would continue to be the responsibility of the Welsh Government, sitting alongside other 'skills' interventions. SH went on to give a background to WEST, and how we have arrived at the current situation.
- Current situation – SH went on to outline that there are concerns about Tribal's ability to provide the ideal service that the Welsh Government would wish for. It is recognised that there are other models/tools available, but initial feedback from users is mixed. A consultation will follow, but early options are:
 - Remove the need to use WEST by Nov 24 (but noting that timescales are too tight)
 - Go back out to market – noting that financial resources are difficult
 - Use 'G cloud' (a WG procurement tool) to go to market to run a 'maintenance level' contract.
- SH informed the group that WG have started the process to change programme specifications to allow providers to use a tool of their choice. Discussions have been held with both Estyn and Qualifications Wales, and they have indicated an agreement in principle.

Discussion with group members followed, with the overarching message being the need for consistency across all forms of providers, and the need to investigate whether the use of WEST (or similar) needs to be more targeted in future.

c. Apprenticeships (Alun Gosney and Chris Hare)

AG provided the following update:

- 2024 / 25 contract – All should have received contract letter by now. AG confirmed that any ‘underspend’ from 2023 / 24 can be carried over into 2024 / 25. There was some discussion round the changes to freeze dates, but it was felt that this could be addressed by more robust profiling.

CH went on to provide the following policy updates:

- SASW consultation – CH outlined that there are four proposed modifications, some of which have already been issued as guidance. The four being:
 - Additional Proxies for ESQs – inc. for digital literacy for the first time.
 - Additional Learning Needs (ALN) – the proposed modifications have been part of the Programme Specifications for some time
 - Degree and Professional Apprenticeships – this has always been the case, but the proposed modifications aim to formalise
 - Minimum credit value for frameworks
- Success Rates – CH outlined that he was looking to establish the Network’s appetite to form a small working group to discuss the drop in Success Rates. Pre-Covid they were at 82%, in 2021 / 22 they were 66% and in 2022 / 23 they were at 72%.

Group members briefly discussed some of the issues are being seen in some sectors, especially Health and Social Care (high levels of learners with ESOL needs) and Hospitality and Catering (displacement of learners)

Action – Volunteers for a Success Rates Working Group to contact LM / JP by Wed 8 May 24

4. Employability - Jobs Growth Wales + (Julie Dyer)

JD gave the following update:

- Year 2 of the programme has just closed – a very successful contract year, with unprecedented demand being seen
- 4,700 starts last year – 2,900 progressed into the second year.
- A 5% reduction to contract allocation this year.
- Network has worked closely with WG to maximise contract value and compliance challenges
- High demand for learners with mental health and wellbeing issues – may have an impact on performance
- Unlikely to see a ‘Summer School’ this year
- Positive progressions around 59% (Cab Sec pleased with result – good to see that he is now FM)
- One contractor presenting to circa 30 – 40 WG officials next week
- Estyn inspections will now be on thematic as opposed to individual provider performance. Likely that first will be around supporting learners’ mental health and wellbeing
- Beginning to have conversations with WG about what next after this procurement framework finishes
- The flexibility in the programme is key to its success

5. Any Other Business

No AOB raised

6. Date of next meeting: Fri 5 Jul 24 (10.30am – 12.00pm) via MS Teams

ACTIONS

Action	Lead
Action – JP/LM to follow up with RE to discuss/agree a way forwards with regards to communication between the Commission, Welsh Government and members of the CCH Reference Group.	LM / JP
Action – Volunteers for a Success Rates Working Group to contact LM / JP by Wed 8 May 24.	CCHs